

Message

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East Chicago press clips
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Chicago

Scott Pruitt's New Plan for the EPA Will Destroy Towns Like This One
Pruitt: East Chicago Needs More than "Basics" from EPA
East Chicago residents ready for EPA chief's visit
AACP president inspires fight against 'environmental racism' in East

<http://m.motherjones.com/environment/2017/04/scott-pruitt-new-epa-agenda-east-chicago>

Scott Pruitt's New Plan for the EPA Will Destroy Towns Like This One

(long read)

<https://www.nrdc.org/experts/meleah-geertsma/pruitt-east-chicago-needs-more-basics-epa>

Pruitt: East Chicago Needs More than "Basics" from EPA

(long read)

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/east-chicago-residents-ready-for-epa-chief-s-visit/article_d40817c2-0165-5d7c-a241-86deadb7e3da.html

East Chicago residents ready for EPA chief's visit

- [Sarah Reese sarah.reese@nwi.com, 219-933-3351](mailto:sarah.reese@nwi.com)
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- Apr 18, 2017 Updated 8 hrs ago EAST CHICAGO — Residents hope to show EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt on Wednesday how they have been affected by the city's legacy of industrial pollution and lead drinking water lines, and let him know cuts to the agency he leads could threaten the health and safety of their community and others like it throughout the nation.

Pruitt will be visiting the USS Lead Superfund site, which gained a national spotlight last summer after the city ordered more than 1,000 residents at the West Calumet Housing Complex to relocate.

Approximately 3,000 residents — living at 1,000 properties in zones 2 and 3 of the Superfund site in East Chicago's Calumet neighborhood — have not been told to leave. The Environmental Protection Agency plans to resume removing lead- and arsenic-contaminated soil from around their homes early next month.

Maritza Lopez, a Superfund resident, said the East Chicago/Calumet Coalition Community Advisory Group began seeking a meeting between Pruitt and residents shortly after learning he planned to visit.

Pruitt needs to talk face to face with residents, so he can fully understand what they're experiencing, she said.

"We're the front line. We're the ones living through this," she said.

Others plan to take their message for Pruitt to the streets.

A community rally is scheduled from 11 a.m. to noon Wednesday at the 151st Street Recreation Center, which is inside the West Calumet Housing Complex, at 4925 Gladiola Ave.

The NAACP also has several events planned.

"We have to take this fight to the administration," said NAACP President Cornell William Brooks at a prayer service Tuesday night at Friendship Baptist Church. "That means this EPA administrator has to understand that this crisis is at the top of his list," Brooks said. On Wednesday morning, the NAACP will have an environmental justice roundtable starting at 8 a.m. at First Baptist Church, 4911 McCook Ave.

Drinking water petition pending

Republican Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb on Feb. 9 issued a 30-day executive order declaring a state of emergency in the Superfund site and later extended the order an additional 30 days.

Pruitt agreed to visit the Superfund site last month, following requests from Holcomb; U.S. Sen. Todd Young, R-Indiana; U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly, D-Indiana; and U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Merrillville.

On March 2, the same day the congressmen wrote to Pruitt, the Natural Resources Defense Council and 16 other organizations petitioned the EPA under the Safe Drinking Water Act to use its emergency powers to address high lead levels EPA found last fall in the city's drinking water.

EPA discovered high lead levels in the city's drinking water as part of a pilot study related to removing lead-contaminated soil, but lead in water is unrelated to lead in soil. Up to 90 percent of East Chicago's water lines could contain lead, officials said.

East Chicago for years may have not been sufficiently treating its water to prevent leaching of lead from aging pipes, and a change in spring 2015 to a chemical approved by the state could have been worse than conducting no corrosion control at all, said Virginia Tech professor Marc Edwards.

The city again changed chemicals in September, but the latest chemical and the dose being used may not be enough to protect residents from lead entering their water, he said.

EPA says no level of lead in water is safe, and recently recommended residents should assume they have lead lines and use a certified water filter.

However, East Chicago has been in compliance with EPA's Lead and Copper Rule since 1993, officials said. EPA is planning to propose revisions to the 1991 Lead and Copper Rule this year, the agency said.

IDEM has committed to additional testing of East Chicago's water, and is working with a contractor to distribute free water filters to residents in zones 2 and 3 of the Superfund site.

The petition to EPA says the city and Indiana Department of Environmental Management have not adequately responded to the drinking water issue, and EPA has the authority to step in. Emails obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request show IDEM may consider possible elevated lead levels in drinking water to be localized to the Superfund site, while EPA has said they're likely citywide.

Federal help needed, groups say

Meleah Geertsma, senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, on Tuesday accused Pruitt of wanting to fundamentally change how EPA protects Americans by shifting responsibility for environmental protection to the states without giving them added resources.

"The East Chicago emerging drinking water crisis shows how fraught Pruitt's scheme really is for public health. Indiana state regulators signed off on the use of water treatment chemicals that may have created the lead contamination issue in East Chicago's drinking water," the council said.

"Federal EPA officials had to bring 15-year-old research to state regulators' attention to trigger a move to more appropriate corrosion-control chemicals. And federal EPA staffers were the ones to identify the contamination of drinking water in the first place.

"Without the feds, this problem would likely still be festering. Now federal help is needed to ensure safe water for the people of East Chicago, while a long-term solution to the problem is put in place. Administrator Pruitt has yet to respond to petitions to use his emergency power to help."

In a letter to Pruitt, the Community Advisory Group asked that the drinking water petition be granted. The CAG also asked Pruitt to direct EPA staff to engage residents in the decision-making process, expedite a groundwater study and commit to adjusting cleanup plans as needed after release of a new public health assessment, among other requests. Samuel Henderson, an attorney at the Hoosier Environmental Council, said the city is so heavily affected by industrial pollution that children moved from a school in the Superfund site now attend another school a few hundred feet downwind from a dump created to contain toxic sediment dredged from the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal.

"The environmental conditions in East Chicago have to be seen to be believed," he said.

"What we have learned about contamination in the Superfund site is likely just scratching the surface of contamination that exists citywide. And — as The Times' recent report on drinking water in Gary shows — it's likely that the problems that are coming to light in East Chicago are shared by other communities in Northwest Indiana, too."

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/naacp-president-inspires-fight-against-environmental-racism-in-east-chicago/article_4bc39352-555b-5aeb-83af-49138de4c323.html

NAACP president inspires fight against 'environmental racism' in East Chicago

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EAST CHICAGO — Those suffering at the hands of environmental injustice in East Chicago are much like the four lepers who were besieged by famine and disease in the Old Testament, NAACP President the Rev. Cornell William Brooks bellowed to those in the church pews Tuesday night.

"The story tells us that these lepers, who were on the outside of credibility, on the outside of authority, on the outside of power, were faced with an existential choice," Brooks said. "Sitting outside these city gates, surrounded by the enemy, hungry day and night, they were faced with a choice: 'We can stay here and go into the city and die. We can stay where we are and die. Or perhaps we can pick up and go into the camp of our enemies and live.'"

Friendship Baptist Church — where Brooks spoke Tuesday night at a prayer service sponsored by the NAACP — sits in one of three predominantly poor, minority neighborhoods in the 346-acre USS Lead Superfund site in East Chicago. The site first gained national attention last summer after the city's mayor ordered more than 1,000 residents at the West Calumet Housing Complex to relocate.

Since that time, several community groups have manifested and partnered with environmental law, civil rights and housing justice nonprofits and organizations in an effort to fight for better protections against health threats associated with living on toxic soil, breathing in air pollution and drinking lead-contaminated water.

Brooks' bellowing voice was met with standing ovations by those in the church pews as he asked for a large showing Wednesday during EPA Administration Scott Pruitt's visit to the USS Lead Superfund site.

"We have to take this fight to the administration. That means this EPA administrator has to understand that this crisis is at the top of his list," Brooks said.

The night included songs of praise, alternating with speakers and prayer for Superfund residents. Katherine Eglund, chairman of environmental and climate justice for the NAACP, offered her support in the East Chicago lead crisis.

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," Eglund told the crowd, quoting Martin Luther King Jr.

Just two dozen of the 332 West Calumet families remained on site this week, with the city eyeing to tear down the complex before year's end. Residents have received moving assistance, including relocation vouchers, but Brooks argued it's too little, too late.

"Is a Section 8 voucher sufficient compensation for the damage that's been done to this community? Is a Section 8 voucher that is not honored by landlords in the communities in which you most want to live is sufficient compensation? If the answer to that is no, we have to have a serious, thoughtful, long-term litigation strategy," he said.

Tara Adams, a longtime West Calumet resident recently uprooted to Hobart, offered up a powerful message of what environmental injustice means to her.

"We are more than this land. We are worth more than this property. See, what makes me upset is that they asked for money to demolish West Calumet, but you can't ask for money to help me get a refrigerator?" Adams yelled "I have a problem with that. People over property. People over money. People over profit. That is what we need."

Adams, involved in several community groups since last summer, was moved to tears Tuesday night as she thanked everyone who has provided aid in some way.

"I would like to thank everyone that said a prayer, everyone that dropped off a bottle of water, thank you so much, everyone that dropped a nickel, dime, quarter, penny and whatever you did for West Calumet, Calumet, East Chicago and the city at large, because we're in this battle for real."

Sincerely,

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